

# National Car Care Month

Do Good,  
Make Money



**F**rom engineering through materials to manufacturing processes, technology is advancing at an unprecedented rate, which is resulting in motor vehicles that are ever more trouble-free. What that means to us in the auto service business is that we will have to gradually shift our focus from repairs to maintenance. And that's what National Car Care Month, which falls in April, helps to emphasize.

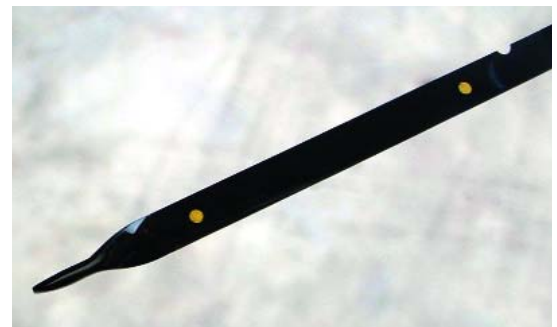
Throughout its long history, this industry initiative has always been about making motorists aware of the benefits of sensible car care as a way of heading off, or at least postponing, the need for repairs — "Be Car Care Aware." Subaru of America has been a supporter of this effort for years because not only does good maintenance result in improved owner experience and brand reputation, which may enhance future sales, but it also helps sell parts.

The 2005 NCCM was the most successful on record with over 400 inspection lanes set up around the U.S., all sponsored by local organizations and businesses. When the information on the inspection forms was compiled, it made a dramatic point about the continuing lack of consumer awareness where automotive maintenance is concerned.

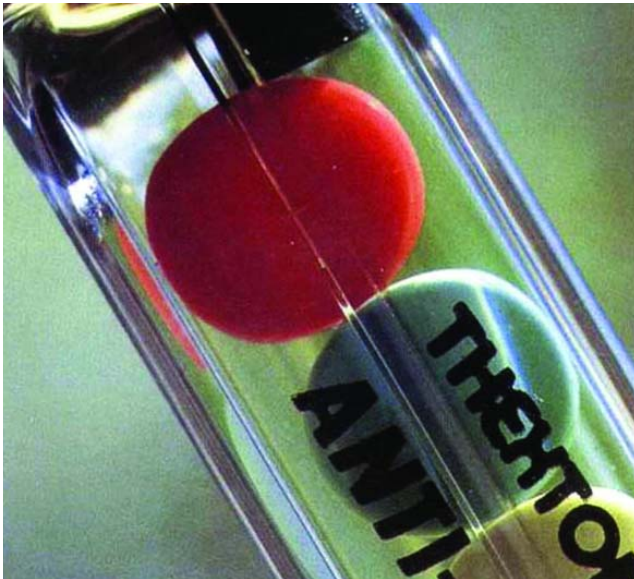
Fully 85% of the cars examined were in immediate need of at least one service.

The following facts will give you an idea of the huge amount of work that's just not getting done out there in the harsh real world.

## Lubricants and Fluids



- Close to 30 percent of vehicles failed the inspection because of low, overfull or dirty motor oil.
- More than one-quarter of the vehicles inspected (26 percent) had either low, overfull or burnt transmission fluid.



*Just because there's a liquid in the cooling system doesn't mean it's the right stuff, or is mixed in the proper 50/50 proportions.*

- 23% had low or contaminated brake fluid (more on this later).
- 21% had low or dirty power steering fluid.
- 18% failed the washer fluid inspection.
- More than one-tenth of the vehicles inspected (11%) had low levels of coolant in the radiator and 16% had low coolant levels in the surge tank.



- One-fifth of the vehicles inspected needed a coolant flush.
- An additional 8% of vehicles had coolant leaks.

Think about what those figures add up to for motorists — and for you. There's no doubt that a great deal of mechanical damage and many breakdowns, some bad enough to relegate the vehicle to the local wrecking yard because the cost of repairs would exceed the car's value, are happening unnecessarily because prudent maintenance measures are simply not being taken.

True, many of the motorists involved don't have a regular service provider, and simply flog their cars until something critical fails. The others, though, the regular customers who consider you the shepherd of an automotive flock, are being let down. Their owner's manuals tell them to have regular jobs done at specified intervals, but it seems that hardly anybody actually opens those helpful books. So, it becomes your responsibility to inform these people of the need for regular lube and fluid changes in order to save them from shockingly high repair bills. One service manager puts it succinctly: "Fluids are cheap; parts and labor are expensive."

Some shop owners may have what we consider an unenlightened attitude about this situation, thinking of it as a benefit to them that more lucrative repair jobs will be showing up at their shops because those consumers aren't taking care of their cars. But that doesn't stand up to analysis. In the first place, regular maintenance services are just that — regular. They provide a steady income and the opportunity to actually visit with your customers. That's when you can keep them informed of any additional work you believe their cars need, or will need shortly. This includes such things as brake relines and belt and radiator

hose replacement. If instead of fostering such business, you depend on breakdown repairs, not only will you never know when you might be busy, but when the car does show up at your door, either on the hook or under its own steam, the customer will be upset and perhaps difficult to deal with. It's much better to give your patrons a nice, even, uneventful car ownership experience. If you handle them properly, they'll come to think of you as something like a hero, and recommend your services to their friends. That's the best advertising you can get.

### Vision and Visibility

Besides your customer's budget, there's his or her safety to consider. Two of the primary factors here are that the driver can see where he or she is going, and can be seen by other motorists.



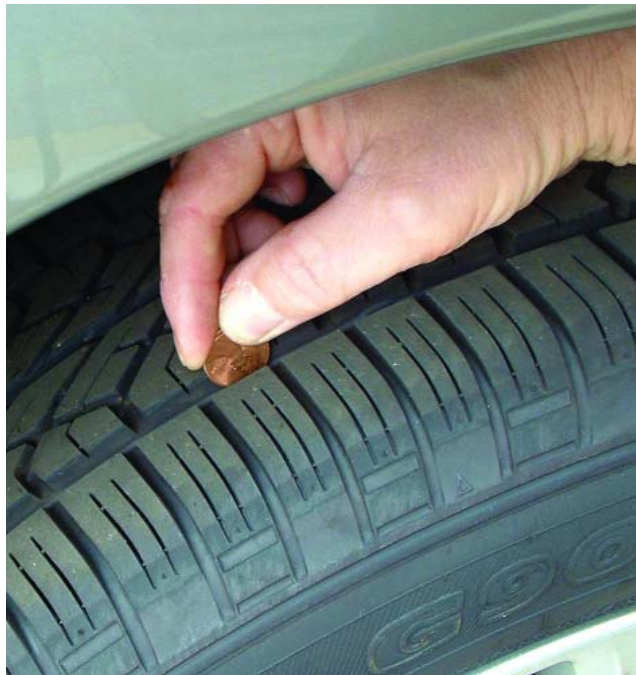
In spite of the obvious importance of clear vision and visibility, last year's NCCM statistics exhibit a dangerous lack of attention on the part of motorists. At least 17% of the cars examined had worn-out or otherwise unsatisfactory front windshield wipers, and 12% had rear wiper or washer problems. As you know, new wipers represent a profitable, no-problem sale.

The figures compiled for lighting failures are startling, too:

- **Brake Lights:** 13%
- **License Plate Lights:** 9%
- **Backup Lights:** 5%
- **Side Lights:** 5%
- **Turn Signals:** 5%
- **Parking Lights:** 3%
- **Headlights:** 3%
- **Tail Lights:** 2%

While you won't make a lot of money replacing these, with the possible exception of headlights, keeping them all glowing will be appreciated by your customers. In fact, some shops replace the easy ones for no charge as a goodwill gesture that keeps motorists coming back. Regardless, it's your responsibility to make sure all the lights work whenever a car's in for LOF or other service.

## Wheel/Road Interface



Tires are another safety-related area, but the number of problems here is actually lower than you might expect. While 21% of the vehicles inspected had low tire pressure at one or more of their four corners, only 16% showed tread wear that was beyond acceptable limits, and 11% had damage of one kind or another. Still, that represents quite a bit of work for those of you who include tires in your menu of services.

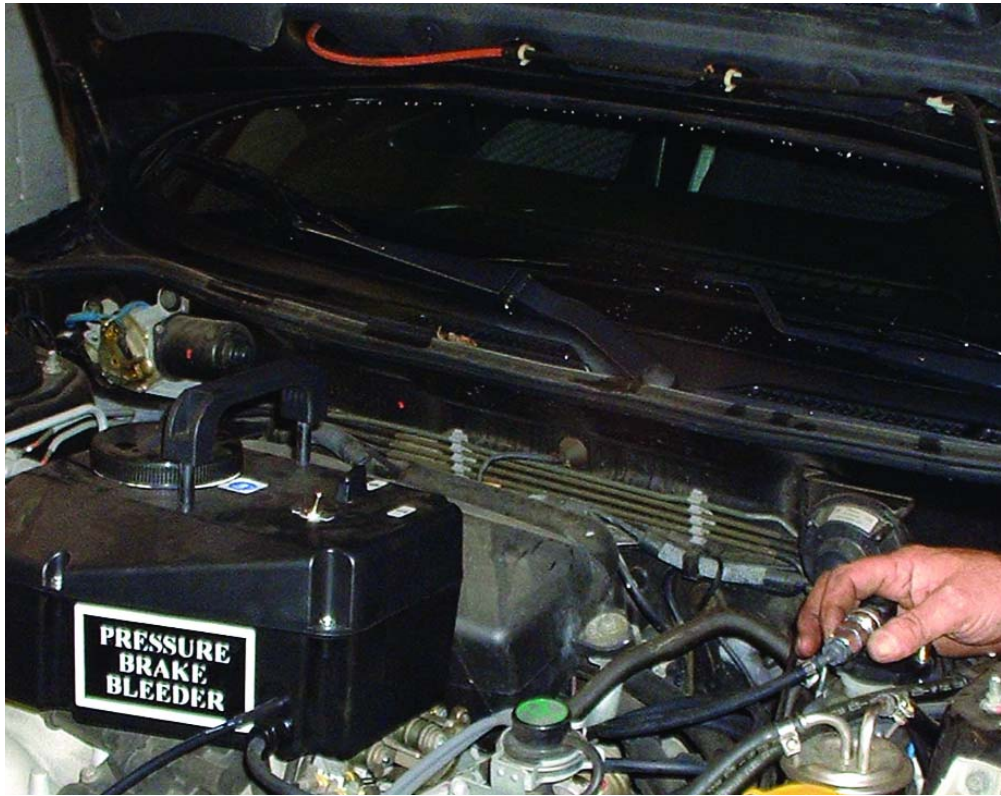


*One quick way to detect contaminated brake fluid is to dip a special strip into the reservoir and compare the color that appears on it to a chart. You can staple the strip to the R.O. to show the customer.*

While we're still on the subject of safety, we can't very well ignore brakes, the hottest service area in the business. Lining and rotor wear is obviously the first issue that springs to mind here, but the thing that gets regularly ignored is the brake fluid. To insure against expensive hydraulic system repairs, especially where that intricate ABS unit is concerned, Subaru makes the sensible recommendation that brake fluid be replaced every 30 months, or 30,000 miles. Unfortunately, how many motorists ever have this done, or are even aware of the need? Explaining that a replacement ABS control unit would cost thousands of dollars will get their attention.

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**Right:** *Once you've sold the job, equipment that pressurizes the master cylinder will make flushing fast.*





Of course, safety isn't a concern if you can't get the car started in the first place, which brings up the condition of the battery and its cable connections. In 13% of the vehicles checked, battery cables, clamps or terminals were in unacceptable condition. Doesn't anybody out there ever open the hood? This stuff should be pretty obvious, but, once again, it's your responsibility because motorists either don't know or aren't paying attention.

### Tune Up?

By the traditional definition, it's not possible to "tune-up" a car anymore. But since practically all motorists have that term deeply etched in their minds, it becomes our job to come up with a new definition. The logical thing here is to bundle performance, driveability and emissions maintenance services. While NCCM inspection lanes aren't equipped to check out ignition systems or tailpipe pollution, they do identify neglected items that imply that the basics such as spark plugs aren't being attended to when they should be, either. For example, 24% of the vehicles examined needed a new air filter element, and 13% hadn't had PCV system maintenance.

We should mention that Subaru is bucking the industry trend toward spark plug replacement only every 100,000 miles by recommending what we consider a much more realistic interval: every 30,000. Explain to your customers that this will avoid the tragic possibility of thread seizure, which can result in the need for cylinder head removal and



the escalation of a simple maintenance job into the major repair category.

We'll conclude with a couple of other not-so-surprising stats: Of the cars checked, 19% needed a belt, and 17% at least one hose.

For more information on the NCCM program and brochure availability, visit:

[www.carcare.org/Industry/BCCA\\_brochure.shtml](http://www.carcare.org/Industry/BCCA_brochure.shtml)